

Report on the Enrichment programme 2019-2020

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2. Introduction and background.

Please note that the content of this report is based on research, but it is also an interpretation of the data. I hope the readers will find their opinions represented, but, as always in education, many will disagree with parts of the consensus presented in this document.

In education, it is always a good idea to start from the principle that it is useless to teach someone something they already know or understand, and that it is equally pointless to teach them something they cannot learn yet. It is the job of the teacher, the school and the school system to create a context and classroom that can cater for the needs of every student as much as possible. Furthermore, the needs of every single student should be addressed, and no student should be (dis-)advantaged.

But every system, school or teacher has limitations. The European School System does not allow for two L1s even though a considerable number of students can be considered bilingual. The European School System does not allow for the creation of a new group unless the other parallel groups have all reached the maximum number of students. This means that (temporary) groups with a specific function, for instance a group for newcomers, have to be filled up with other students who may or may not benefit from being in such a group.

It is undeniable that a considerable number of students who used to be part of the bilingual (or L1-level L2) group were very happy there. I can also not be denied that it was a pity that the previous system did not allow for a larger number to get access to higher level classes or that the L1-level group was not more flexible.

This report will focus on the best solution for different groups:

1. Bilingual students
2. Students that are (far) above the expected level of the class or very talented/high achieving students
3. Regular students
4. Students that are below the expected level of the class
5. Students with specific learning disabilities

And formulate advice for the different cycles and school levels.

Note that though the research was done in a serious way, this is not strictly speaking a scientific report. Its findings are based on (*sources that were made available to management*):

1. *A questionnaire for parents and students (267 respondents)*
2. *A questionnaire for teachers (40 respondents)*
3. *A focus group meeting with teachers from the primary (Uccle)*
4. *A focus group meeting with teachers from the primary (Berkendael)*
5. *A focus group meeting with teachers from the secondary*
6. *A meeting with representatives of APEEE*
7. *Several formal documents by APEEE and groups of parents (e.g. APEEE adopted statement on grouping in L2 (June 2019), concerns on the roll-out of L2 pilot enrichment programme (November 2019), Feedback from parents of children in S2 S3 and S5 advanced L2 EN classes (March 2020 and 2 April 2020)).*
8. *Several informal ad hoc emails from parents and teachers.*

Because the sources are not anonymous, it is my suggestion that they are not shared with the larger school population. If individuals wish to share their opinion, they can do so in their own name and in their own way.

3. Specific groups and their needs

a. True bilingual students

Students who have two dominant languages are relatively common in the European School System. They can be defined as students who are comfortable using two languages in most aspects of their lives and who have a native speaker level in both those languages. The reasons for this are diverse: they may have been raised in both languages, they could have received schooling in one language for several years or they might be a SWAL, effectively having received instruction in a second language for most of the time.

Unfortunately, the European School system does not have specific regulations that cater to the needs of bilingual students, and it is up to the schools to identify these students and devise a way of adapting the class situation to provide a suitable education.

Because they are truly bilingual, the needs of these students are very different from second language learners, especially when starting their education in the second dominant language. It is therefore understandable that many bilingual students and their parents reacted very strongly to the abolition of the bilingual group.

Ideally, true bilingual students should be in a separate group, at least for the formative years of the programme. This group should exist as a separate entity with its own programme, its own requirements and perhaps its own final exam. The name given to this group should also be clear, for instance L1 could become first native or dominant language and for bilingual students L2 should be called second native or dominant language. Since the underlining principles of teaching native languages and those of teaching foreign languages are fundamentally different, I would suggest that what is currently called L2-L5 is renamed first foreign language to fourth foreign language.

In order for a system to be created that allows bilingual students to get the education they want and need, the following criteria should be met:

- The second dominant language programme is similar to the first dominant language programme.
- The requirements and B-tests should equally be of a similar level.
- Parents need to understand this and need to be aware of the conditions for their child to enter such a group. These conditions should/could be:
 - The student was raised in both languages
 - OR the student has received schooling in the language for several years
 - AND the student passed a test when she entered the class. This test should be of the same difficulty as a test in the first dominant language class.
- The distinction between native and foreign languages needs to be made clear at a system and school level, so there can be no confusion. All native language classes will forego certain essential parts of foreign language classes and will assume an extensive prior knowledge.

In brief, it is my advice that the needs of bilingual students are met by reforming the system: more than one dominant language should be allowed. The choice for two dominant languages must imply the choice for a different syllabus and for a different exam. These students could still follow other subjects in their second dominant language with other students taking these subjects in their first foreign language.

b. Students that are (far) above the expected level of the class or very talented/high achieving students

It could be argued that these student's needs should be met through differentiation in the classrooms. However, it must be considered that in any given L2 class group, there are generally a few beginners (with many beginners in some years, such as p1/2 and s1/2) and equally a few more advanced students. It is therefore essential to analyse the spread of the level of the group: how far are certain students above the grade level and other students below the grade level. The further the students are from the grade level, the more useful enrichment (or indeed support) seems to be.

This is the expected attainment level at the end of a cycle:

Primary	A2 (B1 for more advanced students)
Secondary s1-3	B1
Secondary s4-5	B2
Secondary s6-7	C1
Secondary s6-7 advanced	C1+

Sources: L2 syllabuses on eursc.eu

Students whose level is much higher than that of the group they find themselves in clearly enjoy and benefit from enrichment. The exception is p1-2, where students are still very much working on the development of basic skills, and the teachers do not think that separating the students is a good idea. From s4 on, the rising level of the class decreases the need for enrichment, and from s6 on this need seems to disappear altogether.

Furthermore, there is a clear tendency of parents, teachers and students to prefer classes with at least two periods. Enrichment with only one period seems to not work as well. This is also true for the time spent in the regular classes, with the exception of s1 French where the enrichment students only spent one period in the regular lessons, when they did project work with the other students. This project work and the organisation of enrichment in this group was generally experienced as positive.

It should be noted that in order for enrichment in combination with attendance in the regular lessons to truly work, the number of L2 lessons has to be 4 or more. Based on the feedback of the parents, students and teachers and noting that there was no consensus in the amount of teaching periods, I would suggest the following:

Cycle	Total periods L2	Suggested periods enrichment
P1-2	2:30h	0
P3-5	5	2/3
S1-3	5/4	2 (possibly 3 in s1)
S4-5	3	0
S6-7	3	0

For logistical reasons, all enrichment groups in the same year group should have the same amount of teaching periods, although it may be possible to choose a different structure per language. In smaller L2 sections/groups the teacher may choose to not have enrichment at all, since all students can comfortably be catered for through differentiation.

The vast majority of students that were in enrichment were (very) positive about enrichment and their teachers.

c. Regular students

Regular students can be defined as students that are generally close to the grade (class) level and that do not have special educational needs. These students have mostly experienced positive side effects as they have more time to talk during the lessons without the enrichment students and the teachers can focus more on what they need specifically. They frequently feel less intimidated to participate without the stronger students, but equally like it when they can sometimes work with the more advanced students.

Teachers have remarked that there are some logistical challenges in teaching classes with changing student populations. Equally, some have noted that it is convenient to sometimes work with a more homogeneous class group, i.e. without the strongest students.

The students and teachers remarked that it was not always clear who went to enrichment and why, and that the group dynamics changed when the enrichment students were (not) there. Many teachers remarked that it is perhaps not the best idea to plan enrichment in a single period that is part of two consecutive periods of L2.

d. Students that are below the expected level of the class

Although this paper is not focussed on students that are below the expected level of the class, they need to be included since frequently their needs are parallel to those that are above the expected level. The closer to the class level the student is, the less need there is for support (or rattrapage). Thus, the need for support increases as the expected attainment level rises but decreases as the number of students below the grade level diminishes.

Based on the feedback of teachers, support should not be offered during the regular L2 lessons but should consist of extra periods of L2. In-class support can also be considered as an effective way to help a student.

A beginner's group can be useful, but only (1) if there are only true beginners in the group and not weaker students, (2) if they are small enough to allow teachers to frequently work with individual students and (3) if the students in the groups become part of a regular mixed level group after a maximum of one school year.

Under no circumstances can weaker students who are not beginners or SEN students who are not beginners be added to the beginners' group. These students deserve to be educated within regular mixed-level classes.

e. Students with specific learning disabilities

Like the previous category of students, SEN students are not part of the scope of this paper, but they are included since they require specific support. SEN students can be part of a 'bilingual' group if they meet the criteria. Equally, they can be part of enrichment, language support or the beginners' group if they meet the criteria. The SEN students should be treated as every other student, and should be given the same learning opportunities, which means that measures to ensure equity may be necessary.

4. Formal aspects of enrichment

Two main issues came from the feedback: the lack of clear guidelines (or a test) for who goes into the enrichment classes and the lack of any kind of programme or syllabus. Other issues were that the grouping was perceived as being both too dynamic (students were added too frequently) and not dynamic enough (no new students were added after the start of the school year), that the efficiency of the communication in general and specifically between subject teachers and enrichment teachers could be improved and the question of whether or not there should be an evaluation (or mark) for enrichment.

There is something of a consensus in favour of a level test to decide who goes into enrichment and all stakeholders want clearer guidelines as to who belongs in enrichment. For this year, the subject teachers based who was added to the groups on who it would be beneficial for. It is my suggestion that a group of teachers representing the different languages and cycles decide on who enrichment is for and that the teachers teaching a specific year group and language then use these criteria to decide on some form of test. Note that this test should only be used as an indication and that it should only decide who goes to enrichment at the start of a year. It was the intention that the groups be evaluated in December and March and that students could be added and removed at the start of January and April.

I would also suggest that the first group decide on a very general set of guidelines as to what teachers can teach in enrichment. These guidelines should focus on what teachers can and should do in the enrichment classes in general *can do / can understand* descriptors, without prescriptive rules. The teacher of one enrichment year-group can then translate these guidelines into what they will do in their classes. It is imperative that the enrichment teachers can adapt their lessons to match the content of the subject teachers and to the needs of their students, and that for that reason any syllabus should allow as much freedom as possible.

In order to facilitate the organisation of enrichment, it seems advisable that there are two (September and January) or three (idem, incl. April) moments in a school year where students can be added to or removed from the enrichment groups. This will allow the teachers to plan their lessons effectively while at the same time catering to the changing needs and levels of the students. If a test is available, perhaps it would be a good idea to test the all students at the start of the school year and the prospective students in December and March.

In smaller L2 subjects, cooperation between subject teachers and enrichment teachers can work informally. However, in larger L2 subjects, such as EN L2 in the secondary classes, a more formal approach is advised. Perhaps more communication between them could be organised through a

folder in a SharePoint Group or a TEAM, or enrichment teachers could update the subject teachers several times throughout the year. It would be my suggestion that each language department discusses and decides on this topic at the start of the next school year.

Several teachers have requested a formal evaluation to be included in the enrichment programme and several teachers have expressed serious reservations. Since there is no consensus, even within a single language and year group, it is my suggestion that for every report card, enrichment teachers send written feedback on the enrichment students to the subject teachers. The subject teacher then decides on the mark and gives written feedback to the parents. Should the students spend more time in enrichment than in the regular classes, the situation should be reversed: the student gets the mark from the teacher he spends most time with.

5. Other observations coming from the data

The following statements have been included because they are interesting conclusions coming from the questionnaires, although they might not be very relevant to the reason this report was written.

1 2 3 4 5
Completely agree / Always Completely disagree / Never

1. Most people agree that enrichment has not had a negative impact on the classes.
2. Most students and parents agree that the lessons without the enrichment students work well and that the remaining students have more opportunity to participate.
3. Most students and parents agree that teachers should adapt their lessons to the average level of the class AND that the teachers should follow the prescribed curriculum (both of which can be mutually exclusive).
4. Same-level groups are generally thought to be beneficial to the students (although most research concludes in most cases they are not).
5. Most students and parents agree that the students' needs are met.
6. Most students that are in enrichment believe it is a useful addition to the regular class and almost all students enjoy the classes.
7. The communication around enrichment is generally experienced as clear.
8. In general, there is a feeling that the system this year works less well than last year, although most people are neutral (and some very negative).
9. The regular lessons are regularly perceived as being too easy and only rarely too hard.
10. Many students in enrichment feel their needs are not met in the regular classes, but that their needs are met in combination with enrichment.
11. It is very clear from the written feedback that most students are very positive about their teachers (enrichment or regular lessons).
12. Most teachers believe enrichment is a useful addition to the regular L2 classes.
13. Most teachers believe the students learn a lot in enrichment.